THE

ANTIQUITY OF MAN

AND THE

WORD OF GOD.

BY

A FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY.

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1864.

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With J. H. Gladstone's kind regards.

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A LARGE amount of evidence has lately been brought to bear upon the question of the Antiquity of Man. Flint implements have been found in apparently undisturbed gravel in the valley of the Somme, and in other deposits which, though recent in the eyes of the geologist, can scarcely be estimated as less than many thousand years old. The remains of man have been discovered in caves mixed with the bones of animals now extinct, under circumstances that seem to prove them to be contemporaneous. Other bones of the same kind have been dug up with the marks of edge tools made apparently before they were fossilized. The different varieties of men are believed, on scientific as well as theological grounds, to have come from a single stock, but judging from what we know of the antiquity of certain African races, it seems to require a longer period than that which is commonly supposed to have elapsed since the Deluge, to produce all this variation. A similar argument applies to the diversities of language. There are traditions of

the Indian, Chinese, and Egyptian nations which have an air of veracity about them, and, if true, require an extension of the ordinary historical period. Arguments tending to the same conclusion, but more doubtful, have been derived from the finding of pottery and brick in the alluvium of the Nile, at three or four times the depth of the foundation of a statue erected more than three thousand years ago; from the advanced state of certain arts in the earliest historical periods; and from the position in which many antiquities have been found, as for instance those of Denmark associated with an extinct flora.

These considerations have convinced many that man has lived upon the earth for much longer than six thousand years; and though others are not prepared to put faith in such a conclusion, they feel that the question is one which at the present moment assumes considerable importance. No one of the arguments, perhaps, is absolutely conclusive, but taken together, they form a concurrent testimony which cannot be easily gainsaid; especially when it is remembered that there is no reason whatever for assigning this shorter duration to the history of man, except that one which is at the foundation of the generally received opinion, and which I believe to be unsound.* That argument is the Bible chronology.

* The only other argument which seems worth naming is that founded on the present number of the inhabitants of the globe as compared with the increase of population. But how are we to know the rate at which to compute it, when some nations are rapidly increasing and others diminishing?

If it is believed that the conclusion in question is in opposition to the statements of God, we need not wonder that many Christian people recoil from the whole subject as one of infidel origin and tendency, and that some of the advocates of the great antiquity of man have spoken or written as though the fact, if proved, would give a severe blow to revealed religion. I have never shared in this fear, and a closer examination of the subject has only tended to convince me that the difficulty is founded on misconception.

The only question of real importance is, Has God revealed anything respecting the age of the human race? It is only the belief that He has that presents a serious difficulty. The answer that will be given to this question must depend very much upon the exact understanding of what it implies, and it may be well to glance first at what it does not mean.

The question is not, Does our Authorized Version of the Bible say anything about the age of the human race? We all know it does. It gives 4004 plus 1864, that is, 5868 years since the creation of Adam; but for this we have only the word of Archbishop Usher.

The question is not, Do the canonical Scriptures say anything about it? They do. In Genesis there occur genealogical tables with the age of the father at the birth of the son, and these lists of names are repeated in the First Book of Chronicles, and the Gospel according to St. Luke. The ancient chronology, beyond the time of Abraham, rests entirely on these tables. There are

strange variations between the different ancient versions of the Bible in respect to the dates; thus the Hebrew accounts for two thousand and twenty-three years between Adam and the departure of Abraham from Haran, whilst the Samaritan Pentateuch gives two thousand three hundred and twenty-four years, and the Septuagint allows three thousand two hundred and seventy-nine years. And this difference has arisen mainly from an intentional alteration of the numbers, a hundred years having been added pretty systematically to the age of the parent at the birth of his son in the one version, or subtracted from it in the other. Yet the longest of these periods is inadequate for the requirements of modern science.

The question is, Does the Word of God say anything on this subject? It is desirable in studying this, and every other theological question, to adhere closely to the language of those sacred Scriptures from which all our theology should be derived. Hence I use designedly the expression, the Word of God. That expression, under some form or other, occurs many hundreds of times in the sacred writings, as any one may see by consulting Hebrew and Greek concordances; and it is used for any part of that declaration of His will or revelation of His purposes which God has made at sundry times, and in divers manners, by the prophets, or by His Son, who is pre-eminently entitled the Word. The expression is used for the commands of the Most High, whether they were ever committed to writing or not: it is never once

× And God said Let there be Light &c
and God saw that it was good
o not these expressions in

used, I believe, in any form for any part of that historical setting in which the Divine revelation has been transmitted to posterity. This is highly honoured, and frequently referred to by Jesus Christ and by inspired writers as authentic history; but when quoted, no such expression is ever applied to it as "God said," "the Holy Ghost spake," but the references are introduced thus: "The Scripture saith," or "It is written," (see for instance, John vi. 31; Rom. iv. 3; xi. 2; 2 Cor. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 22, 30; James ii. 23.) To the question, Does the Word of God declare anything as to the age of man? the only correct answer I conceive is, No; and this should be sufficient to remove all difficulty from the mind of a believer in the Word of God, in accepting the fair deductions of human science on the subject.

Yet it is worth while to look a little closely into the nature of the genealogical table above referred to, the only thing in Holy Writ which bears upon the subject. Three quite distinct theories are possible:—

I. That it was given by Divine revelation.

II. That it is a list handed down by tradition, but free from error. This may be either because it was preserved from error throughout the ages during which name after name was added to it, or because it was corrected when incorporated in the sacred history.

III. That it was the genealogical table commonly received at the time when the sacred historian arranged his materials.

Did Moses venture to use them? Charlotte Bowerbank

The supposition that this genealogical table was given by direct revelation does not appear to rest on any foundation. It is almost superfluous to add that such a claim is never put forth on its behalf by any of the sacred writers. Such an inference has indeed been drawn from the passage in 2 Tim. iii. 16, "All Scripture divinely inspired and profitable, etc.;" but we have no proof that the word θεόπνευστος implies revelation, and even were that the case, the word "all" may be used in a general sense, as in common language, and in such passages as Matt. iii. 5; Mark i. 37; xi. 32; Acts iv. 21; 2 Tim. iv. 17. But in order to understand the force of this negative argument, it is requisite to bear in mind how constantly the prophets and apostles, in giving their message, affirm that it comes from the Lord, and what a large amount of proof is accumulated around such declarations. In most, if not all cases, the bearer of the message was authenticated by miracles, or by the utterance of predictions; and the messages themselves consist principally of doctrines and precepts immensely superior to any which the most enlightened of heathens have imagined, adapted to the highest needs of man, and accompanied by an influence so mighty that, though the Christian religion is opposed to the natural disposition of man and to many of his pre-conceived ideas, it has leavened modern society, and now claims as its own a larger portion of the intelligent inhabitants of the world than at any former period of its history. But the Divine authorship of the genea-

logical tables is not attested either by external or internal evidence.

In such an argument as this, Church authority has of course no place; but it may be interesting to state, and satisfactory to some minds, that the view of various kinds or degrees of inspiration seems to have been generally held in the Jewish and Christian Church in all ages, though a theory of uniform and verbal inspiration has been propounded from time to time, has received the sanction of many honoured divines, and during the past century has made such rapid progress amongst some prominent portions of the Christian community, that it is assumed to be the orthodox opinion in many religious circles, and in nearly all infidel ones.

There are very many Christians who, without believing in the direct revelation of this list of names, are unwilling to view it as simply the tradition of men. They suppose that in some way the general accuracy of this and the other genealogical tables in the Bible has been secured by Him who guided the inspired penman. The adoption of this list by the evangelist Luke, in tracing the genealogy of our Saviour, strengthens their conviction of its truthfulness. A minute examination of the practice of the sacred writers in regard to such lists will point out two methods, by either of which they may be reconciled with a greater antiquity of the human race than six or eight thousand years.

1st. The abbreviation theory. St. Matthew begins his gospel, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ,

the son of David, the son of Abraham." If this verse were all the information we had on the subject, we should suppose that Abraham was the grandfather of Jesus Christ, and yet in point of fact nineteen centuries intervened. St. Matthew goes on to supply the intermediate names thus: "Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob," etc., concluding, "so all the generations, from Abraham to David, are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations." But in order to produce this numerical symmetry, the names of Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah are left out, and Ozias is said to have begotten Joatham, though he was his great-great-grandfather. And later on in the list, the name of Jehoiakim is omitted between Josias and Jechonias. In the Old Testament the word "son" frequently means only descendant, and in the formal genealogies themselves great omissions often occur, as for instance in that of Ezra (Ezra vii. 1—5), where the ninth, tenth, and part of another century B.C. are passed over without a name. But it is hard to say how far this may arise from errors of transcribers, before the Septuagint version was made. In St. Matthew's gospel of course it is done by design; and if this abbreviation was the case in comparatively late generations where it is easily recognized, we do not know to what extent the same plan may have been pursued where we cannot trace it. By comparing the different lists of the family

of Benjamin, given in Gen. xlvi. 21; Numb. xxvi. 38—41; 1 Chron. vii. 6—12; viii., we not merely find grandsons called sons, but some of the persons mentioned in 1 Chron. vii. would appear to be neither sons nor grandsons of Bela and Becher, but distinguished men among their descendants.

2nd. The dynastic theory. In Gen. x. we have the genealogies of the descendants of Noah, and their dispersion over the earth; but in looking over these names, we find many of them with the plural termination, and unquestionably not individuals, but tribes or nations. And one nation is said to beget other nations. It is indeed not possible to say which are individuals, and it is quite conceivable, that Methuselah or Nimrod are the names of nations, like Misraim and Amorite, or of reigning families or dynasties, like Pharaoh, Agag, and Cæsar.

The main difficulty in these schemes of reconciliation is, the statement of the age of the father when the son was born.

These genealogical tables were naturally accepted as correct and complete, when there was no reason for doubting them, but if we conclude that the human race has existed for much more than six thousand years, it lessens or removes some difficulties that otherwise meet us in the Book of Genesis from the apparent populousness of the earth in primeval times, the immense longevity of the patriarchs, the number of cities founded by one man, and the frequent dispersion of brothers to very great distances when there appears no adequate object.

Indeed it was the consideration of these Bible statements which led me about fourteen years ago to come to the conclusion that the earth was fuller of inhabitants in the early ages than we generally imagine, and that a different canon of interpretation should be applied to these lists than would be applicable to modern writings. The recent discoveries of science have therefore only strengthened a conclusion arrived at from the study of Holy Writ.

It is, however, no part of my purpose to insist on any method of reconciling the statements of Scripture with the deductions of natural science, or to press Scripture itself into being one of the witnesses in favour of the greater antiquity of man. It is sufficient that we recognize the fact, that *God has revealed nothing from which any date can be assigned to the creation of the human race.*